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H.P. Blavatsky

Excerpt

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THE VEIL OF ISIS.

PART ONE.—SCIENCE.

CHAPTER I.

“Ego sum qui sum.”

—*An axiom of Hermetic Philosophy.*

“We commenced research where modern conjecture closes its faithless wings. And with us, those were the common elements of science which the sages of to-day disdain as wild chimeras, or despair of as unfathomable mysteries.”—BULWER’S “ZANONI.”

THERE exists somewhere in this wide world an old Book—so very old that our modern antiquarians might ponder over its pages an indefinite time, and still not quite agree as to the nature of the fabric upon which it is written. It is the only original copy now in existence. The most ancient Hebrew document on occult learning—the *Siphra Dzeniouta*—was compiled from it, and that at a time when the former was already considered in the light of a literary relic. One of its illustrations represents the Divine Essence emanating from ADAM* like a luminous arc proceeding to form a circle; and then, having attained the highest point of its circumference, the ineffable Glory bends back again, and returns to earth, bringing a higher type of humanity in its vortex. As it approaches nearer and nearer to our planet, the Emanation becomes more and more shadowy, until upon touching the ground it is as black as night.

A conviction, founded upon *seventy* thousand years of experience, † as they allege, has been entertained by hermetic philosophers of all periods that matter has in time become, through sin, more gross and dense than it was at man’s first formation; that, at the beginning, the

* The name is used in the sense of the Greek word *ανθρωπος*.

† The traditions of the Oriental Kabalists claim their science to be older than that. Modern scientists may doubt and reject the assertion. They *cannot* prove it false.

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human body was of a half-ethereal nature ; and that, before the fall, mankind communed freely with the now unseen universes. But since that time matter has become the formidable barrier between us and the world of spirits. The oldest esoteric traditions also teach that, before the mystic Adam, many races of human beings lived and died out, each giving place in its turn to another. Were these precedent types more perfect ? Did any of them belong to the *winged* race of men mentioned by Plato in *Phædrus* ? It is the special province of science to solve the problem. The caves of France and the relics of the stone age afford a point at which to begin.

As the cycle proceeded, man's eyes were more and more opened, until he came to know "good and evil" as well as the Elohim themselves. Having reached its summit, the cycle began to go downward. When the arc attained a certain point which brought it parallel with the fixed line of our terrestrial plane, the man was furnished by nature with "coats of *skin*," and the Lord God "clothed them."

This same belief in the pre-existence of a far more spiritual race than the one to which we now belong can be traced back to the earliest traditions of nearly every people. In the ancient Quiché manuscript, published by Brasseur de Bourbourg—the *Popol Vuh*—the first men are mentioned as a race that could reason and speak, whose sight was unlimited, and who knew all things at once. According to Philo Judæus, the air is filled with an invisible host of spirits, some of whom are free from evil and immortal, and others are pernicious and mortal. "From the sons of EL we are descended, and sons of EL must we become again." And the unequivocal statement of the anonymous Gnostic who wrote *The Gospel according to John*, that "as many as received Him," *i.e.*, who followed practically the esoteric doctrine of Jesus, would "become the sons of God," points to the same belief. (i., 12.) "Know ye not, ye are *gods*?" exclaimed the Master. Plato describes admirably in *Phædrus* the state in which man once was, and what he will become again : before, and after the "loss of his wings ;" when "he lived among the gods, a god himself in the airy world." From the remotest periods religious philosophies taught that the whole universe was filled with divine and spiritual beings of divers races. From one of these evolved, in the course of time, ADAM, the primitive man.

The Kalmucks and some tribes of Siberia also describe in their legends earlier creations than our present race. These beings, they say, were possessed of almost boundless knowledge, and in their audacity even threatened rebellion against the Great Chief Spirit. To punish their presumption and humble them, he imprisoned them *in bodies*, and

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THE BOOKS OF HERMES.

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so shut in their senses. From these they can escape but through long repentance, self-purification, and development. Their *Shamans*, they think, occasionally enjoy the divine powers originally possessed by all human beings.

The Astor Library of New York has recently been enriched by a facsimile of an Egyptian Medical Treatise, written in the sixteenth century B.C. (or, more precisely, 1552 B.C.), which, according to the commonly received chronology, is the time when Moses was just twenty-one years of age. The original is written upon the inner bark of *Cyperus papyrus*, and has been pronounced by Professor Schenk, of Leipsig, not only genuine, but also the most perfect ever seen. It consists of a single sheet of yellow-brown papyrus of finest quality, three-tenths of a metre wide, more than twenty metres long, and forming one roll divided into one hundred and ten pages, all carefully numbered. It was purchased in Egypt, in 1872-3, by the archæologist Ebers, of "a well-to-do Arab from Luxor." The New York *Tribune*, commenting upon the circumstance, says: The papyrus "bears internal evidence of being one of the six *Hermetic Books on Medicine*, named by Clement of Alexandria."

The editor further says: "At the time of Iamblichus, A.D. 363, the priests of Egypt showed forty-two books which they attributed to Hermes (Thuti). Of these, according to that author, thirty-six contained the history of all human knowledge; the last six treated of anatomy, of pathology, of affections of the eye, instruments of surgery, and of medicines.* The *Papyrus Ebers* is indisputably one of these ancient Hermetic works."

If so clear a ray of light has been thrown upon ancient Egyptian science, by the accidental (?) encounter of the German archæologist with one "well-to-do Arab" from Luxor, how can we know what sunshine may be let in upon the dark crypts of history by an equally accidental meeting between some other prosperous Egyptian and another enterprising student of antiquity!

The discoveries of modern science do not disagree with the oldest traditions which claim an incredible antiquity for our race. Within the last few years geology, which previously had only conceded that man could be traced as far back as the tertiary period, has found unanswerable proofs that human existence antedates the last glaciation of Europe—over 250,000 years! A hard nut, this, for Patristic Theology to crack; but an accepted fact with the ancient philosophers.

* Clement of Alexandria asserted that in his day the Egyptian priests possessed forty-two Canonical Books.

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Moreover, fossil implements have been exhumed together with human remains, which show that man hunted in those remote times, and knew how to build a fire. But the forward step has not yet been taken in this search for the origin of the race; science comes to a dead stop, and waits for future proofs. Unfortunately, anthropology and psychology possess no Cuvier; neither geologists nor archæologists are able to construct, from the fragmentary bits hitherto discovered, the perfect skeleton of the triple man—physical, intellectual, and spiritual. Because the fossil implements of man are found to become more rough and uncouth as geology penetrates deeper into the bowels of the earth, it seems a proof to science that the closer we come to the origin of man, the more savage and brute-like he must be. Strange logic! Does the finding of the remains in the cave of Devon prove that there were no contemporary races then who were highly civilized? When the present population of the earth have disappeared, and some archæologist belonging to the “coming race” of the distant future shall excavate the domestic implements of one of our Indian or Andaman Island tribes, will he be justified in concluding that mankind in the nineteenth century was “just emerging from the Stone Age?”

It has lately been the fashion to speak of “the untenable conceptions of an uncultivated past.” *As though it were possible to hide behind an epigram the intellectual quarries out of which the reputations of so many modern philosophers have been carved!* Just as Tyndall is ever ready to disparage ancient philosophers—for a dressing-up of whose ideas more than one distinguished scientist has derived honor and credit—so the geologists seem more and more inclined to take for granted that all of the archaic races were contemporaneously in a state of dense barbarism. But not all of our best authorities agree in this opinion. Some of the most eminent maintain exactly the reverse. Max Müller, for instance, says: “Many things are still unintelligible to us, and the hieroglyphic language of antiquity records but half of the mind’s unconscious intentions. Yet more and more the image of man, in whatever clime we meet him, rises before us, noble and pure from the very beginning; even his errors we learn to understand, even his dreams we begin to interpret. As far as we can trace back the footsteps of man, even on the lowest strata of history, we see the divine gift of a sound and sober intellect belonging to him from the very first, and the idea of a humanity emerging slowly from the depths of an animal brutality can never be maintained again.”*

* “Chips from a German Work-shop,” vol. ii., p. 7. “Comparative Mythology.”

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LIMITATIONS OF PHYSICAL SCIENCE.

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As it is claimed to be unphilosophical to inquire into first causes, scientists now occupy themselves with considering their physical effects. The field of scientific investigation is therefore bounded by physical nature. When once its limits are reached, enquiry must stop, and their work be recommenced. With all due respect to our learned men, they are like the squirrel upon its revolving wheel, for they are doomed to turn their "matter" over and over again. Science is a mighty potency, and it is not for us pigmies to question her. But the "*scientists*" are not themselves science embodied any more than the men of our planet are the planet itself. We have neither the right to demand, nor power to compel our "modern-day philosopher" to accept without challenge a geographical description of the dark side of the moon. But, if in some lunar cataclysm one of her inhabitants should be hurled thence into the attraction of our atmosphere, and land, safe and sound, at Dr. Carpenter's door, he would be indictable as recreant to professional duty if he should fail to set the physical problem at rest.

For a man of science to refuse an opportunity to investigate any new phenomenon, whether it comes to him in the shape of a man from the moon, or a ghost from the Eddy homestead, is alike reprehensible.

Whether arrived at by the method of Aristotle, or that of Plato, we need not stop to inquire; but it is a fact that both the inner and outer natures of man are claimed to have been thoroughly understood by the ancient andrologists. Notwithstanding the superficial hypotheses of geologists, we are beginning to have almost daily proofs in corroboration of the assertions of those philosophers.

They divided the interminable periods of human existence on this planet into cycles, during each of which mankind gradually reached the culminating point of highest civilization and gradually relapsed into abject barbarism. To what eminence the race in its progress had several times arrived may be feebly surmised by the wonderful monuments of old, still visible, and the descriptions given by Herodotus of other marvels of which no traces now remain. Even in his days the gigantic structures of many pyramids and world-famous temples were but masses of ruins. Scattered by the unrelenting hand of time, they are described by the Father of History as "these venerable witnesses of the long bygone glory of departed ancestors." He "shrinks from speaking of divine things," and gives to posterity but an imperfect description from hearsay of some marvellous subterranean chambers of the Labyrinth, where lay—and now lie—concealed, the sacred remains of the King-Initiates.

We can judge, moreover, of the lofty civilization reached in some

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periods of antiquity by the historical descriptions of the ages of the Ptolemies, yet in that epoch the arts and sciences were considered to be degenerating, and the secret of a number of the former had been already lost. In the recent excavations of Mariette-Bey, at the foot of the Pyramids, statues of wood and other relics have been exhumed, which show that long before the period of the first dynasties the Egyptians had attained to a refinement and perfection which is calculated to excite the wonder of even the most ardent admirers of Grecian art. Bayard Taylor describes these statues in one of his lectures, and tells us that the beauty of the heads, ornamented with eyes of precious stones and copper eyelids, is unsurpassed. Far below the stratum of sand in which lay the remains gathered into the collections of Lepsius, Abbott, and the British Museum, were found buried the tangible proofs of the hermetic doctrine of cycles which has been already explained.

Dr. Schliemann, the enthusiastic Hellenist, has recently found, in his excavations in the Troad, abundant evidences of the same gradual change from barbarism to civilization, and from civilization to barbarism again. Why then should we feel so reluctant to admit the possibility that, if the antediluvians were so much better versed than ourselves in certain sciences as to have been perfectly acquainted with important arts, which we now term *lost*, they might have equally excelled in psychological knowledge? Such a hypothesis must be considered as reasonable as any other until some countervailing evidence shall be discovered to destroy it.

Every true *savant* admits that in many respects human knowledge is yet in its infancy. Can it be that our cycle began in ages comparatively recent? *These cycles*, according to the Chaldean philosophy, *do not embrace all mankind at one and the same time*. Professor Draper partially corroborates this view by saying that the periods into which geology has "found it convenient to divide the progress of man in civilization are not abrupt epochs which hold good simultaneously for the whole human race;" giving as an instance the "wandering Indians of America," who "are only at the present moment emerging from the stone age." Thus more than once scientific men have unwittingly confirmed the testimony of the ancients.

Any Kabbalist well acquainted with the Pythagorean system of numerals and geometry can demonstrate that the metaphysical views of Plato were based upon the strictest mathematical principles. "True mathematics," says the *Magicon*, "is something with which all higher sciences are connected; common mathematics is but a deceitful phantasmagoria, whose much-praised infallibility only arises from this—that

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THE PYTHOGOREAN NUMERALS.

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materials, conditions, and references are made its foundation." Scientists who believe they have adopted the Aristotelian method only because they creep when they do not run from demonstrated particulars to universals, glorify this method of inductive philosophy, and reject that of Plato, which they treat as unsubstantial. Professor Draper laments that such speculative mystics as Ammonius Saccas and Plotinus should have taken the place "of the severe geometers of the old museum."* He forgets that geometry, of all sciences the only one which proceeds from universals to particulars, was precisely the method employed by Plato in his philosophy. As long as exact science confines its observations to physical conditions and proceeds Aristotle-like, it certainly cannot fail. But notwithstanding that the world of matter is boundless for us, it still is finite; and thus materialism will turn forever in this vitiated circle, unable to soar higher than the circumference will permit. The cosmological theory of numerals which Pythagoras learned from the Egyptian hierophants, is alone able to reconcile the two units, matter and spirit, and cause each to demonstrate the other mathematically.

The sacred numbers of the universe in their esoteric combination solve the great problem and explain the theory of radiation and the cycle of the emanations. The lower orders before they develop into higher ones must emanate from the higher spiritual ones, and when arrived at the turning-point, be reabsorbed again into the infinite.

Physiology, like everything else in this world of constant evolution, is subject to the cyclic revolution. As it now seems to be hardly emerging from the shadows of the lower arc, so it may be one day proved to have been at the highest point of the circumference of the circle far earlier than the days of Pythagoras.

Mochus, the Sidonian, the physiologist and teacher of the science of anatomy, flourished long before the Sage of Samos; and the latter received the sacred instructions from his disciples and descendants. Pythagoras, the pure philosopher, the deeply-versed in the profounder phenomena of nature, the noble inheritor of the ancient lore, whose great aim was to free the soul from the fetters of sense and force it to realize its powers, must live eternally in human memory.

The impenetrable veil of arcane secrecy was thrown over the sciences taught in the sanctuary. This is the cause of the modern depreciating of the ancient philosophies. Even Plato and Philo Judæus have been accused by many a commentator of absurd inconsistencies, whereas the

* "Conflict between Religion and Science," ch. i.

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design which underlies the maze of metaphysical contradictions so perplexing to the reader of the *Timæus*, is but too evident. But has Plato ever been read understandingly by one of the expounders of the classics? This is a question warranted by the criticisms to be found in such authors as Stalbaum, Schleirmacher, Ficinus (Latin translation), Heindorf, Sydenham, Buttman, Taylor and Burges, to say nothing of lesser authorities. The covert allusions of the Greek philosopher to esoteric things have manifestly baffled these commentators to the last degree. They not only with unblushing coolness suggest as to certain difficult passages that another phraseology was evidently intended, but they audaciously make the changes! The Orphic line:

“Of the song, the order of the *sixth race* close”—

which can only be interpreted as a reference to the *sixth* race evolved in the consecutive evolution of the spheres,* Burges says: “. . . was evidently taken from a cosmogony where man was feigned to be created the last.” †—Ought not one who undertakes to edit another’s works at least understand what his author means?

Indeed, the ancient philosophers seem to be generally held, even by the least prejudiced of our modern critics, to have lacked that profundity and thorough knowledge in the exact sciences of which our century is so boastful. It is even questioned whether they understood that basic scientific principle: *ex nihilo nihil fit*. If they suspected the indestructibility of matter at all,—say these commentators—it was not in consequence of a firmly-established formula but only through an intuitional reasoning and by analogy.

We hold to the contrary opinion. The speculations of these philosophers upon matter were open to public criticism: but their teachings in regard to spiritual things were profoundly esoteric. Being thus sworn to secrecy and religious silence upon abstruse subjects involving the relations of spirit and matter, they rivalled each other in their ingenious methods for concealing their real opinions.

The doctrine of *Metempsychosis* has been abundantly ridiculed by men of science and rejected by theologians, yet if it had been properly understood in its application to the indestructibility of matter and the immortality of spirit, it would have been perceived that it is a sublime conception. Should we not first regard the subject from the stand-point

* In another place, we explain with some minuteness the Hermetic philosophy of the evolution of the spheres and their several races.

† J. Burges: “The Works of Plato,” p. 207, note.

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THE HELIOCENTRIC SYSTEM HINDU.

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of the ancients before venturing to disparage its teachers? The solution of the great problem of *eternity* belongs neither to religious superstition nor to gross materialism. The harmony and mathematical equiformity of the double evolution—spiritual and physical—are elucidated only in the universal numerals of Pythagoras, who built his system entirely upon the so-called “metrical speech” of the Hindu *Vedas*. It is but lately that one of the most zealous Sanskrit scholars, Martin Haug, undertook the translation of the *Aitareya Brahmana* of the *Rig-Veda*. It had been till that time entirely unknown; these explanations indicate beyond dispute the identity of the Pythagorean and Brahmanical systems. In both, the esoteric significance is derived from the number: in the former, from the mystic relation of every number to everything intelligible to the human mind; in the latter, from the number of syllables of which each verse in the *Mantras* consists. Plato, the ardent disciple of Pythagoras, realized it so fully as to maintain that the Dodecahedron was the geometrical figure employed by the *Demiurgus* in constructing the universe. Some of these figures had a peculiarly solemn significance. For instance *four*, of which the Dodecahedron is the trine, was held sacred by the Pythagoreans. It is the perfect square, and neither of the bounding lines exceeds the other in length, by a single point. It is the emblem of moral justice and divine equity geometrically expressed. All the powers and great symphonies of physical and spiritual nature lie inscribed within the perfect square; and the ineffable name of Him, which name otherwise, would remain unutterable, was replaced by this sacred number 4, the most binding and solemn oath with the ancient mystics—the *Tetractys*.

If the Pythagorean metempsychosis should be thoroughly explained and compared with the modern theory of evolution, it would be found to supply every “missing link” in the chain of the latter. But who of our scientists would consent to lose his precious time over the vagaries of the ancients. Notwithstanding proofs to the contrary, they not only deny that the nations of the archaic periods, but even the ancient philosophers had any positive knowledge of the Heliocentric system. The “Venerable Bedes,” the Augustines and Lactantii appear to have smothered, with their dogmatic ignorance, all faith in the more ancient theologians of the pre-Christian centuries. But now philology and a closer acquaintance with Sanskrit literature have partially enabled us to vindicate them from these unmerited imputations. In the *Vedas*, for instance, we find positive proof that so long ago as 2000 B.C., the Hindu sages and scholars must have been acquainted with the rotundity of our globe and the Heliocentric system. Hence, Pythagoras and Plato knew well this astronomical truth; for Pythagoras obtained his knowledge

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in India, or from men who had been there, and Plato faithfully echoed his teachings. We will quote two passages from the *Aitareya Brahmana* :

In the "*Serpent-Mantra*,"* the *Brahmana* declares as follows : that this *Mantra* is that one which was seen by the Queen of the Serpents, *Sarpa-rājni* ; because the earth (*iyam*) is the Queen of the Serpents, as she is the mother and queen of all that moves (*sarpāt*). In the beginning she (the earth) was but one head (round), without hair (*bald*), *i.e.*, without vegetation. She then perceived this *Mantra* which confers upon him who knows it, the power of assuming any form which he might desire. She "pronounced the *Mantra*," *i.e.*, sacrificed to the gods ; and, in consequence, immediately obtained a motley appearance ; she became variegated, and able to produce any form she might like, *changing one form into another*. This *Mantra* begins with the words : "*Ayam gaūh prīś'nir akramīti*" (x., 189).

The description of the earth in the shape of a *round* and *bald* head, which was *soft* at first, and became *hard* only from being breathed upon by the god *Vāyu*, the lord of the air, forcibly suggests the idea that the authors of the sacred Vedic books knew the earth to be *round* or spherical ; moreover, that it had been a *gelatinous* mass at first, which gradually cooled off under the influence of the air and time. So much for their knowledge about our globe's sphericity ; and now we will present the testimony upon which we base our assertion, that the Hindus were perfectly acquainted with the Heliocentric system, at least 2000 years B.C.

In the same treatise the *Hotar*, (priest), is taught how the *Shastras* should be repeated, and how the phenomena of sunrise and sunset are to be explained. It says : "The *Agnishtoma* is that one (that god) who burns. The sun *never sets nor rises*. When people think the sun is setting, it is *not so* ; they are mistaken. For after having arrived at the end of the day, it produces two opposite effects, making night to what is below, and day to what is on the other side. When they (the people) believe it rises in the morning, the sun only does thus : having reached the end of the night, it makes itself produce two opposite effects, making day to what is below, and night to what is on the other side. In fact the sun never sets ; nor does it set for him who has such a knowledge. . . . " †

This sentence is so conclusive, that even the translator of the *Rig-Veda*, Dr. Haug, was forced to remark 'it. He says this passage contains "the *denial* of the existence of sunrise and sunset," and that the author supposes the sun "to remain always in its high position." ‡

* From the Sanskrit text of the *Aitareya Brahmanam*. *Rig-Veda*, v., ch. ii., verse 23.

† *Aitareya Brahmanam*, book iii., c. v., 44. ‡ *Ait. Brahm.*, vol. ii., p. 242.